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A

L E T T E R

T O

EARL STANHOPE,

ON THE

SUBJECT OF THE TEST,

AS OBJECTED TO IN A PAMPHLET  
RECOMMENDED BY HIS LORDSHIP.

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E A R L S T A N H O P E , &c.

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· M Y L O R D ,

**A**N obscure person, unknown to your Lordship or to the world, begs leave to address you on the subject of a Pamphlet lately published, and which hath been so highly honoured with your Lordship's approbation, that you have recommended it as the best pamphlet that has been published upon religion for a whole century. The title of the pamphlet is, "The Right of the Protestant Dissenters to a complete Toleration asserted;" but if the pamphlet itself hath nothing in it more worthy of approbation than this title, it is to be feared your Lordship hath been a little too sanguine in your recommendation. Probably

the author made a little mistake here, and meant to have said, “*The Claim of the Protestant Dissenters, &c. justified.*” If, however, he did not, he certainly has undertaken a most Herculean task. It is nothing less than to prove that the Dissenters have a *right* to what others have a superior right to with-hold from them. A right to a toleration is a contradiction in terms, for a toleration must be a matter of favour or courtesy, and not a matter of right. If a toleration is not a matter of favour or courtesy, then no man hath a right either to grant or withhold it, and then what is the author pleading for? is he pleading for a grant which he hath without its being granted? Strange wildness this! It is very much to be feared, my Lord, we shall find this admirable pamphlet not to be the very best pamphlet that has been published upon religion for a whole century.

It is a common case, my Lord, for persons who can discern merit where there is none, not to be able to discover faults where they are most notorious. That the Dissenters have a right to those privileges which the law has given them is beyond a doubt, and thus they have a right to such privileges and exemptions as they enjoy by the act of toleration,

leration, but that they have a right to privileges and exemptions which the law hath not granted them cannot be asserted with any the smallest degree of truth or propriety. No man in society hath a right to privileges till the law of that society hath given them its sanction. More privileges than he enjoys he may indeed lay claim to, but right he can have none to them, because the right is in the society either to grant or to withhold them.

If the Dissenters have a right, why do they not exert it ? who is it withdraws it from them ? their right, if they have any, must be sanctioned by the laws ; let them then appeal to these laws, and act under them, and they need not fear but the laws will protect them in it from any interruption ; but if they have not the laws on their side, they most assuredly have not right, for right in society is established only by law.

But the title and subject of this so admired a performance is open to objection upon another account. The author says, the Dissenters have a right to a *complete* toleration. What does the writer mean by a complete toleration ? does he mean that the Dissenters ought to have all the same privileges as those who are not Dissenters ? but this would not

be a toleration but an establishment, so here your Lordship's pamphletteer blunders again; for, if this was his meaning, he ought not to have used the word toleration. But let us suppose this was not his meaning, and that by the word toleration he means nothing beyond what it signifies in its constant usage. Then the question is, what is to be understood by a complete toleration? words not usually combined together, and which, though they may have some determinate sense in the author's intention, yet in the reader's apprehension are scarcely intelligible.

Whoever is tolerated is completely tolerated in the instance for which the toleration is granted, because an incomplete toleration in the instance for which it is granted is no toleration at all. Now most certain it is that the Dissenters are tolerated in the free exercise of their religion; they have houses wherein they meet together; teachers who direct them; they have a discipline, and rules, and laws of their own, by which they govern themselves unrestrained or controlled; and, in their religious tenets and opinions, let them be ever so wild or absurd, or even false, they are tolerated in the free enjoyment of them. Now if the Dissenters are thus tolerated,

tolerated, wherein, my Lord, is the defect in this toleration ? how, or in what instance are they curbed or restrained in their consciences, or indeed what can possibly be added to this toleration to render it more than it is. Uninterrupted they enjoy their religious opinions, and without interruption they are suffered to worship the Deity in the way which seemeth right to them in their own eyes. Would they have more than the free and uninterrupted enjoyment of their religious opinions and practices ? What can that *more* be ? for, after having granted them ALL that is meant by a religious toleration, any addition to it becomes impossible. Thus, my Lord, we reason unavoidably from the title of this curious pamphlet, and begin to suspect, that by the word toleration the writer means what the word toleration does not signify, and upon looking into the pamphlet we are very fully confirmed in this suspicion ; for instead of stating that the Protestant Dissenters have not the full and undisturbed enjoyment of their religious opinions and practices ; instead of pointing out what the obstacles are which hinder it, and which ought to be removed, it does not appear that there is one single syllable said

upon the subject throughout the whole pamphlet.

The first forty-eight pages are employed in a dry uninteresting detail, which he calls a history of the test laws, and the remaining fifty-one pages, if they have any tendency, tend to prove that Protestant Dissenters ought to enjoy the same civil privileges and emoluments as those who are not Dissenters. But what hath this to do, my Lord, with toleration? are not Dissenters tolerated because the laws of our country have provided that the mayor of a corporation shall be a member of the establishment. The laws have provided not only that the inferior magistrate but that the chief magistrate shall be a member of the establishment, and are the Dissenters not tolerated because a Dissenter cannot be king of England? If there is a defect in the toleration because a Dissenter may not be mayor of a corporation, there is a defect in it because he may not be king of England, and it is not at all improbable but that your Lordship's friend, *the Layman*, thinks as much; however, he must think again before he will think right upon this subject. A religious toleration is a toleration for the purposes of religion only, and is totally detached from every consideration of

lucrative

lucrative offices in or under the state ; and therefore all that the Layman urges concerning the right of Protestant Dissenters to enjoy lucrative places, is just so much of nothing at all to his purpose, which, as his title informs us, is to assert the right of Protestant Dissenters to a compleat toleration. Suppose, my Lord, for the sake of a little amusement, we alter the title of this most admirable pamphlet, and endeavour to bring it a little nearer to the subject of which it treats, will it not run then something to this purpose ? *The right of Protestant Dissenters to the enjoyment of those places of trust and emolument which by the laws are appropriated to members only of the establishment.* But in what, my Lord, must this right commence ? not in in the laws, for the laws are in direct opposition to it ; not antecedent to the laws, for the *test*, as the writer himself acknowledges, was long before any Protestants had separated from the establishment ; and therefore we must look for the origin of this right only in those days (Pt. 2. ch. 1), when man was in a state of nature ; i. e. when he had the happiness of being ornamented with one of lord Monboddo's long tails. Facts, my Lord, never can be established by arguments drawn merely from speculation. If the

the Dissenters have a right it is the right of *Dissenters quā tales*, and not simply as they are men, and therefore any arguments drawn from the rights of mankind in a speculative state of nature do not by any means apply. The Dissenters are persons formed out of a body of men who voluntarily withdrew themselves, in part, from that society to which they did belong, as not chusing to comply with all the terms which it did prescribe; all the right therefore which they appear to have in the case is, a right of being admitted again if they chuse to comply with the society's terms. But it would be strange indeed if they had a right of admission to all the privileges and emoluments of the society, not only without a compliance with its terms, but in direct opposition to them. If the Dissenters' claim of right, as stated by your lordship's friend, the pamphletteer, is just and well-founded, all society in the world is at an end; for in the very idea of a society is included a compliance with the laws by which it is governed and maintained. Desire your friend, my Lord, to consider a little thenature of society, not as it is in the conceits of speculation, but as it exists in fact, and then let him say what possible right a man can have to the profits and advantages of

of that society (and a kingdom is a society only upon a larger scale) with whose terms of admission and laws he does not chuse to comply.

It is not the intention of these pages to examine minutely the several tautologies of this writer: his unnecessary quotations; his quotations upon quotations from journals, speeches, &c. and which, as to the point in question, have very little or no relation at all. It will be sufficient to obviate the main intention of his pamphlet, and to take notice of some of the most obnoxious parts. Let us begin with the following :

“ False foundations (saith the writer, p. “ 53) are naturally accompanied by sophisti-  
“ cal inferences.” He doth not express himself in the clearest manner; however we will take it as he gives it us. Now, p. 52, his words are, “ If I am a good member of the  
“ civil society, I stand upon an equal footing  
“ with every other member, considered as  
“ such; and it is no offence to government,  
“ if I behave with duty and respect to it,  
“ that I worship God in a manner somewhat  
“ different from my neighbours; nor is it a  
“ sufficient reason for excluding me from all  
“ publick service and trust. Incapacities of  
“ the nature in question should be inflicted

“ as

" as punishments for crimes against the state;  
 " and Protestant Dissenters ought to be no  
 " longer liable to *any punishment*, since, by  
 " the laws of England, non-conformity has  
 " ceased to be a crime." On what sort of  
 foundation is this built? assuredly on a  
 foundation which will not support its su-  
 perstructure. If I am, says he, a good  
 member of the civil society. . . But, my Lord,  
 if you please, we will leave out the word  
*good*, and the consequences will be just the  
 same, for he that really is a member of a  
 society is undoubtedly entitled to the privi-  
 leges which belong to the members of that  
 society. Now it is essential to every society  
 in the world, that the persons who are its  
 members should have complied with the  
 terms of admission into it, and that they  
 should submit, as far as they extend, to be  
 governed by its laws; none but persons of  
 this description being entitled to share in the  
 privileges and emoluments of such society.  
 Whoever then is such a member as this of  
 the civil society is not excluded from all pub-  
 lic service and trust, even though he should  
 not be a good member, but only an occasional  
 conformist. What then is the writer aiming  
 at? He is not excluded if he will comply  
 with the terms; and if he does not chuse

to comply with them, whose fault is that ? The civil society exerciseth no authority upon this occasion more than is exercised by every society upon earth ; and, indeed, without the exercise of which it could not possibly be a society. Therefore in this case there is no wrong, no hardship, no punishment inflicted upon Protestant Dissenters, and consequently their complaint is without cause.

But perhaps it may be said, that the *Civil Society* of a country is not of the nature of those formed societies of which it is at a man's option whether he will become a member of them or not. A man is born, without any option of his own, a member of the civil society ; but, observe, of the civil society already formed and established, in which it is provided, that all its members, indifferently, shall share in its support and protection, but that such only as shall have the requisite qualification shall be employed in the public service and trust. If the Dissenter hath that qualification he may be employed as freely as any one that is not a Dissenter ; if he hath it not is the civil society to blame upon this account, or doth the society inflict any punishment upon him for not having it ? By what right then doth he complain ? If he hath a right of complaint, so hath every day

day labourer a much greater right, who is born a member of the civil society, as truly as the Dissenter, and yet, as not being a freeholder (which it neither is nor ever was in his power to have remedied), is not suffered to give his vote in the election of a member of parliament; so likewise is the freeholder, who, let his personal property be ever so great, still is excluded from being a member of the House of Commons if his freehold be not of the prescribed value; and so likewise in a variety of other instances. But no man ever yet heard that these, and such like limitations were considered as punishments, which, at the same time, they must be if the Dissenters' complaints are just.

But the writer says, "It is no offence to "government if he behaves with duty "and respect to it; that he worships God in "a manner somewhat different from his "neighbour." Neither doth government take offence at it, but freely suffers him to do it with impunity. "Nor is it (faith he) "a sufficient reason for excluding me from "all public service and trust." Here, contrary to fact, it is suggested that Dissenters are *excluded* from all public service and trust. They are NOT excluded, places of public service are as open to them as to any others of

of the community. To none are they open, be he *Tros Tyriusve*, who hath not the requisite qualification; and therefore, in this respect, there is not the least degree of difference between a person that is, and a person that is not a Dissenter; neither of them is admissible except qualified as by the wisdom of the laws it is required they should be, and of course the above suggestion hath no truth in it.

The concluding passage in the citation already made is laughable enough: “Incapacities of the nature in question should be inflicted as punishments for crimes against the state; and Protestant Dissenters ought to be no longer liable to *any punishment*, since, by the laws of England, non-conformity has ceased to be a crime.” And so, my Lord, because non-conformity has ceased to be a crime, therefore your Lordship’s friend ought not to be hanged when he is guilty of anything that deserves it. This is pretty and amusing; however, let us take the matter as most probably the author meant it should be taken; i. e. that Dissenters ought not to be liable to any punishment on account of their non-conformity; and let it be granted that they ought not, doth it therefore follow that they ought to be exempted from those restrictions

strictions which are laid upon all in general, without exception ; or can those restrictions, with any manner of truth, be styled punishments which operate upon the whole community ; most assuredly they cannot. The Test laws are general, and compliance with them is required from all ; they do not more particularly affect the Dissenter than the rest of the community ; and therefore by no rule of sense or right reason can they be styled punishments particularly inflicted on the Dissenters. It ever was, even from the days of the Druids, the constant uninterrupted practice of the kingdom, that offices of public service and trust should be in the hands of those only who professed the established religion, let that religion have been what it might ; and whenever it so happened that either through fraud or violence these offices were gotten into other hands, the consequence generally was a subversion and total overthrow of the established religion ; and that such would be the event if the Dissenters should be admitted to places of power and trust there needs no spirit of prophecy to assure us. Religion, my Lord, is the dearest concern of mankind, and the Dissenters would soon convince us how dear it was to them, by making us all bend, as far as

as their power should reach, to their yoke. There was a time when they were in power, and their language then was, that a toleration was establishing iniquity by law; when they are again in power they will doubtless again resume the same language, for the spirit and principle of their religion will dictate it to them.

It is true, your Lordship's friend affects to disclaim every thing of this kind. As he represents matters, the Dissenters (p. 58) are the truest friends and protectors of the establishment, and have saved it from being brought to desolation; in which, if he believes himself, it is well, but it is imagined very few will be inclined to give him credit. We well know when the Dissenters desolated us, and our churches even at this day bear rueful marks of it; but when they saved us from desolation, if known to themselves, is totally unknown to us. At the revolution they certainly did it not, although he wishes to have it thought they did; their conduct at that period was dastardly and unmeritorious in the highest degree; they had just before addressed, and flattered, and cringed to James the Second, persuading him that he might depend upon all the assistance they could give him; but when the storm began

roll, and the throne to totter under the poor infatuated monarch, they then deserted him, joined themselves to his opponents, and now make a merit of this junction, which (as they had deserted their king) was the only thing they could do.

When James was upon the throne, and Popery threatened to become triumphant, the Dissenters, says your Lordship's friend, p. 19, found an asylum in the bosom of the prerogative. Happy mortals! and how did they find this asylum? the reader shall be told. James, for the purpose of effectually subverting the church of England, and establishing Popery in its room, was determined upon the abolition of the Test. In these measures the Dissenters concurred with him, and then found, and if the overruling providence of God had not directed otherwise, would have still continued to find, an asylum in the bosom of the Prerogative, but at the same time in the downfall of the Church of England.

When James failed, at least, when the prospect became so overclouded that there was no room to hope for success, "In this " extremity (saith the pamphleteer) they did " not forget the precarious tenure by which " they held this indulgence;" i.e. they saw that

that James would not be able any longer to afford them an asylum ; and what did they then ? they “ preferred the chance of a legal ‘ toleration to servile dependence on the will ‘ of a prince.” But the king was, or they certainly knew would be ousted, consequently James would have no will on which they might servilely depend ; how therefore was it possible for them to shew that preference which is here spoken of ? Hath not your friend, my Lord, deviated a little in this instance from the strait line of truth and matter of fact ? There was no possibility of any preference being given in the case. James was no longer able to protect or assist them, and without his assistance they were unable to cope with the Church of England ; nay, with it they had failed of success, therefore they had nothing left them but to acquiesce, in hopes that when things were settled there might be a chance of a legal toleration, which at the same time they did by no means deserve.

The principles of the Dissenters are and ever will be hostile to the Church of England ; and, as we have already seen, they will combine even with the Papists for its overthrow ; and moreover, even at this hour, they have the confidence to denominate such

a combination “ a finding an asylum from “ their persecutors in the bosom of the pre-“ rogative ; and yet this writer tells us, that “ the modern Dissenters entertain no opi-“ nions hostile to church or state.” Is it possible for them to use such language as the above, and not entertain opinions hostile to the Church ? Their opinions at this hour are the same as when they combined with James for the overthrow of the church ; and, whenever an opportunity offers, there cannot be a doubt (if we may judge from the language of your Lordship’s friend) they will combine again for the same purpose.

It is well worthy of observation the virulence with which this writer expresseth himself against the friends of the establishment. He tells us, p. 58, “ The defence of the “ Test laws is even now rested upon their “ being a weapon of defence to guard the “ establishment from the attacks of those “ who are prepared to catch at every opportu-“ nity to do it harm ;” and referring to a sermon of bishop Hallifax, he proceeds, “ Do “ Protestant Dissenters catch at every oppor-“ tunity to do harm to the establishment ? “ The right reverend prelate seems to be as “ little acquainted with the history of his “ own country as with *the true spirit of Chris-“ tianity.*”

*"tianity."* What almost could any man say worse, or with blacker malignity, of a Christian Bishop than this? It is true his Lordship needs no vindication from so infamous a charge, and which is so notoriously known to be false, the notoriety of its being false is vindication sufficient; but it serves to shew what manner of spirit your Lordship's friend is of. Again, speaking of the Bishop, p. 59, he says, "Let him enjoy in security and peace his own situation, but let him not become an advocate for persecution, or a traducer of the oppressed." What can be in the head of this man, or what is he dreaming of? Name the persecution that the good Bishop is an advocate for; name the oppressed party that he is traducing. O my noble Earl! how can you be an advocate for a writer who thus, either in folly or madness scattereth his firebrands at random?

As he hath treated the present very worthy Bishop of St. Asaph, so, in like manner doth he treat the prime minister, Mr. Pitt, p. 93, he tells us "the Dissenters had a claim to the gratitude of the minister, in whose elevation they had born a most distinguished part." This piece of intelligence is too much above my comprehension to be

able to make any thing of it, as I never yet heard that the Dissenters were the persons who appointed Mr. Pitt to be the King's prime minister. To be sure this honest man must have something in his head, but what I shall not pretend to conjecture. However, he proceeds : “ Their favourite minister “ (faith he) disclaiming indeed persecution “ in words, admitted the whole extent of “ its principle, and stood foremost in the “ ranks against them ; ” i. e. at the time when they failed in their application for a repeal of the Test laws ; so that here we see even their favourite minister, as they chuse to call him, must not escape the obloquy of the Dissenters if he is a friend to the establishment. He is, it seems, a shameful prevaricator, disclaiming persecution in his words, but standing foremost in the ranks among their persecutors. The minister needs no vindication from this obloquy ; it is known to the whole kingdom that Mr. Pitt is no persecutor ; it is known likewise to the whole kingdom that the Dissenters are not persecuted. But it seems the minister is not only a prevaricator, but a stranger likewise to sound argument ; for, p. 95, “ One of the “ arguments much pressed against the Dis-“ senters was, *the danger arising from innova-*  
*“ tion.*

"*tion.* This argument in the mouth of a statesman hardly deserves a serious answer ;" and yet the argument is a good one, let your mode of answering be what it will ; however, let us see what the answer to it is. "A minister (he says) ought not to fight the battles of a Quixote, nor ought he rashly expose his country to danger ; but it is the duty of his situation to put the public tranquility even to some hazard in favour of a change where the good to be expected considerably exceeds the evil to be feared." Here then the minister's argument, which hardly deserved a serious answer, is acknowledged to be good, *innovation is hazardous.* A change could not be effected without putting the public tranquility to some hazard ; but it was the duty of the minister (he says) to put it to this hazard where the good to be expected considerably exceeded the evil to be feared ; which in the present instance was not the case, for the good arising from it would be the admitting of Messieurs the Dissenters to lucrative places of trust, and the evils to be feared were the subversion and total overthrow of the constitution ; so that the minister's argument, notwithstanding the contemptuous manner

in which this writer hath treated it, is valid, firm, and unanswerable.

From abuse and obloquy the writer proceeds to his peroration, and a flaming one it is, p. 97, "Let not the Protestant Dissenters "put their trust in king, minister, or prelates, but let them confide in THEIR OWN "EXERTIONS, the justness of their cause, "and the generosity of the nation." And again, p. 99, "Should king, minister, and "prelates be arrayed against them, let them "not shrink from the contest." This language, my Lord, it must be owned, is very plain and undisguised, but how far it is calculated for conciliating to the Dissenters the generosity of the nation, may, I think, without much difficulty, be easily ascertained. Little indeed can they be entitled to the generosity of a nation which they are thus labouring to throw into confusion; and if the Dissenters think otherwise, it is imagined, they will find themselves much, very much mistaken. In the threat likewise thrown out against the members of the present House of Commons there is a degree of insolence almost unpardonable. They who have voted for the repeal of the Test laws may go down with confidence to their constituents; but such as have not, and such

he

he is pleased to stile *obstinate advocates for persecution*, can have no claim to their assistance. Fine language this to be used towards any member of the House of Commons when acting in his senatorial capacity, and much more when used towards the majority of that house. The refutation of this most illiberal charge is, that the author of it hath not as yet had his ears nailed to the pillory, which certainly would have been the case, or worse, if the present House of Commons had been the barbarous persecutors which he is pleased to represent them to be. How, my Lord, will you reconcile this virulent abuse of the friends of the establishment with the writer's frequent declaration, that the modern Dissenters are not hostile to the establishment? If they are not hostile to the establishment, why are they so hostile to its advocates and supporters? Can this want any comment? The language of insolence and abuse never can proceed but from the most hostile disposition, nor the language of defiance but from those who are meditating the overthrow of those whom they defy. It is to be hoped this man's voice is not the voice of the Dissenters in general, if it is it must lower them exceedingly in the opinion of those who are well-wishers to the

con-

constitution of their country, a constitution that is the envy and admiration of other countries, and that stands unequalled in the annals of the world. Let us, my Lord, attend a little to it, and more especially because your friend has attached to his pamphlet a letter of Sir William Meredith, wherein the constitution is represented to be so very different from what it really is.

The worthy Baronet's letter it seems was in answer to one from a Dissenting minister at Liverpool, and its sentiments perhaps those of an occasional conformist with the sentiments of the person to whom he addressed himself. His words are these : " All Pro-  
 " testants agree in this one point, to sup-  
 " port our present constitution as a republic,  
 " under the administration of a king, whose  
 " title is sacred while he preserves our laws,  
 " but forfeited if- he attempts to break  
 " them." If these words expressed the real sentiments of the writer he was undoubtedly very much mistaken, and very much a stranger to the real constitution of the English government.

The English constitution neither is nor ever was republican. Its basis is monarchy from the earliest origin to which we can trace it ; and the present government is a monarchy so tempered

tempered, so providentially blended with the Hierarchical, Aristocratical, and Democratical forms of government, as to form one complete whole, wherein both governors and governed are held under the restraint as well as protection of the laws; wherein the subject enjoyeth the fullness of his liberty without licentiousness, and the monarch his powers and his honours without being arbitrary. Gradually framed by the hand of ages, it is now settled into a most truly venerable structure, wherein is treasured up all that is valuable in every form of government known upon the face of the earth. Long, very long, even to the latest posterity may it remain flourishing and firmly fixed on its basis, undisturbed either by popular or fanatical madness, and unoppressed by the iron hand of tyranny or power.

Now from the above short representation of our invaluable constitution it is evident, that all attempts at innovation cannot but be attended with danger in the extreme; and that compliance with the wishes of Dissenters from the establishment would be to risk the total overthrow of the whole fabric; for the idea of the Dissenters, with regard to the constitution (if Sir William Meredith has truly given it) is entirely different from that which

which is here expressed. It is the idea of a republic exercising its authority over the monarchy, saying to their king, you shall not transgress our laws, or you have transgressed them, and we will place another in your room. But this is not the English constitution ; there is nothing of Democratical sternness in it, it is all mild and even, and regulated throughout, so that any irregularity in one part may be instantly and necessarily corrected by the movements of the other parts, without disorder or confusion ; but in the Dissenter's idea, any irregularity happening (and irregularities will sometimes happen in all human governments) there would be no remedy but in wild uproar, and the unrestrained rage of the people ; and to such a miserably perturbed state as this would the constitution, in all probability, be soon reduced were the innovating plan in favour of the Dissenters to take place.

For let it be observed that the repeal of Test laws is not objected to merely on account of the ecclesiastical establishment, but on account of the *whole constitution* to which the principles of the Dissenters are as opposite as they are to the ecclesiastical establishment. It is not merely that the church would, but that the whole constitution would, be endangered by an unlimited admission of

Dissenters

Dissenters of every denomination into offices of power and trust. If Sir William Meredith's letter is a true representation of their principles, they are for a constitution wherein they might feel their own importance, and strut and swagger over a king of straw, and if these are their principles they doubtless would not rest under any other; consequently the gratifying them in the repeal of the Test laws, as it would certainly make a breach in the constitution, so would it as certainly tend to the total subversion of it. Wisely, therefore, most wisely did the minister press the danger arising from innovation, and it is hoped that a dread of that danger will at all times be deeply impressed upon the mind of every senator.

Innovations in the state are never to be attempted under a prospect of a probable good. They are to be attempted only where there is a moral certainty that good will, and that evil will not, be the consequence of them. Nothing is to be risked or hazarded. If there is danger in the projected innovation; if there is no certainty, only a chance, that good will be derived from it, it is a sufficient objection to its being attempted. At the Revolution there was a moral certainty of good in the preservation of our religion and liberties. Nothing was risked or hazarded; for had we failed

failed in effecting the revolution we should have been but where we were before, under the bigotted rule of James, supported by his friends the Dissenters. But for what should any innovating enterprise be undertaken now? Our liberties are all defined; and under our most deservedly and much beloved king we are in the full enjoyment of them. Our religion is unmolested, and we are free in the exercise of all its sacred functions. All the several dissenters of every denomination from the religion of the constitution, are all amply tolerated and unrestrained in the exercise of theirs. Our constitution, if perhaps the keen eye of the philosophical statesman can discern some little imperfection in any part of it, and nothing human is perfect, what man of a sound understanding and a sound and good heart, would wish that any risk should be run in an attempt to remove it; and more especially when that imperfection may be rather said to be discoverable than felt? But with regard to the Dissenters, our constitution hath nothing of imperfection even discoverable in it, unless indeed any man chuses to call it such that they are admitted to have a seat in the House of Commons. The Test laws are no blemish to it, nor if removed would they add any thing to its strength or excellence. How would the constitution shine with greater splendor

splendor because a dissenter might be a Tidewaiter or an Exciseman? which from the pamphlet under consideration, one would imagine was the only reason why the Writer wishes the Test to be removed. But this, your Lordship will be pleased to observe, is a piece of dissenter craft; he mentions only the lowest offices, but hath his eye steadily fixed upon the highest, well knowing that if the one was open to them, it would not be long before they would take possession of the other. It is not for the sake of a Tidewaiter's or Exciseman's place that they wish the Test to be removed, but for something more respectable. However, be it for the one or the other, these offices stand in no need of assistance from the Dissenters, being very well filled and executed by members of the constitution; and therefore any innovation for the sake of admitting the dissenters to offices for which they are not at all wanted, cannot but be considered as extremely unnecessary and impolitic, and in the end would prove injurious to the constitution in the highest degree.

It does not appear by any thing which the Writer of your Lordship's admired pamphlet hath said, that any particular advantage would accrue to the constitution from the repeal of the Test, and the admission of Dissenters to offices of trust. The advantages which he either

either enumerates or refers to are all such as would accrue to the Dissenters only.

It is true he wishes us to think that no harm can arise to the constitution from the admission of the Dissenters. That other countries have made the experiment, and, unfortunately for his argument, p. 81. that the “Court of France had within these few years raised M. Neckar to the head of the finances.” Most unfortunately urged indeed ! However, we will not dwell upon it, nor upon the pitiable and distracted state of France, with Mr. Neckar at the head of its finances. But, notwithstanding this plain evidence to the contrary, let us allow in its fullest scope all that he contends for. That other countries had tried the experiment, and that no harm had arisen from it. Yet how does this apply to us? The English constitution does not prevail in these other countries, nor in any other country upon the globe, that we are acquainted with. And except it did prevail where the experiment had been tried with success, the argument is good for nothing. It is the strength, the preservation, nay, it is essential to the English constitution, that Dissenters from its principle should not be admitted to the administration of its offices; because, if admitted, there is no check provided for preventing them when in office from totally overthrowing it. Let the

the Layman, or any other for him, disprove this if he can.

It is observable also that in the heterogeneous mass of arguments, new vampt from *Tindall, &c.* which he makes use of, and which have been answered an hundred times, he makes the repeal of the test laws to be a matter in which the Church and the Clergy only would be concerned ; and states things as if the lay members of the constitution had nothing at all to do with it ; whereas the Layman is as much concerned in it as the Ecclesiastic ; for when the constitution is laid in ruins, it is not merely the Ecclesiastic, but men of every description in the constitution that would be the sufferers : therefore those persons who have been over persuaded into a favourable opinion of the repeal of the Test laws, ought to reconsider the matter. Revolutions, even when necessity obliges us, are nevertheless dreadful instruments to have recourse to, and during the competition for them it is impossible to say who has most at stake. This man in his threat and suggestion, p. 60, intimates that the Ecclesiastic has. But the fatal event of 1648, and the confusions preceding and subsequent to it, plainly shewed that it is not only the interest of the Ecclesiastic that is concerned in the preservation of

the constitution, but of the whole community.

If it be asked why offices and places of trust are limited only to persons professing the religion of the establishment, the answer is : The religion of the establishment being so admirably adapted to the support of the constitution, being so distant from any possibility of bringing injury or inconvenience to it, and other religions of those that are known to us, be their excellence in other respects what it may, maintaining principles with which it is impossible the constitution can consist ; it is therefore provided by the excellent wisdom of the laws, that no persons but such as profess the religion of the establishment shall be admitted to offices or places of trust. It is not that their creeds or modes of worship, but the principles with regard to government which accompany them, that render persons of this description incompetent to offices or places of trust. In other respects these persons may be as worthy and respectable characters as members of the establishment, but in the principle that accompanies their religion it is impossible they can be well wishers to or hearty supporters of the constitution ; therefore as it is the object of the laws to preserve the constitution

as

as it is at present in its beautiful blendings into one whole of the several known forms of human government, wisely is it provided that the administration of government in all its offices shall be by those whose principles (by profession at least) shall be consistent with its preservation. Such are the principles which naturally accompany the religion of the establishment, and therefore is it required that all who bear offices in the constitution shall be professed members of the establishment. Hence the Test laws are to be considered, not as religious tests, but as tests of principle with regard to the constitution, and when considered in this their true light, he must have either a very weak judgement, or be very unfriendly to the constitution, who wishes their repeal.

One general error pervading the whole of the pamphlet under consideration (and it is to be supposed not an involuntary one) is, that the Test laws are considered as tests of religion, and that they were enacted merely with a view to the preservation of the established church. This is extremely false and unjust, for the principal object in the first framing of these laws, even in their very origin, was the preservation of the *state* from being again reduced under the tyranny

of the Bishop of Rome, and their relation to the church was no otherwise than as the church was incorporated into the state. It is the same now as then, and these laws as in their first intention are to operate for the preservation of the constitution from being reduced under any tyranny, whether lay or ecclesiastical, whether of one or of many; and therefore he who truly is a friend to the constitution as it is at present, and sincerely wishes its continuance, never can consistently with that wish give his vote for the repeal of the Test laws.

Would you, if you are a friend to the constitution, admit to the administration of its government persons who you know are by principle not well-wishers to it, who would change or overthrow it if they could? Must not a man be wonderfully deranged in his judgment that would do this? It is not merely on account of the superior excellence of the religion of the establishment as a religion? it is not for the purpose of gaining profelytes to it from other religions that the Test laws are framed? but it is for the purpose of continuing and preserving the constitution as it is at present, which whoever wishes to have continued to us cannot consistently desire the Test laws to be repealed.

Sir

Sir William Meredith says, the “Romish religion is not bad for society on account of its superstition, but the doctrines it maintains with regard to civil power.” The same is applicable to the Presbyterians, who by principle are professedly Republicans, and who of course never would concur to support a government that was not Republican. The Quaker, the Anabaptist, the Independents in general are all of a levelling principle, enemies to all distinctions of rank or orders. How is it possible such persons could contribute to the support of a constitution which is throughout so beautifully variegated by its gradual and regular subordinations, and which must necessarily cease to be if its inequalities were levelled. In a word, if the Test laws should be repealed the constitution cannot possibly long continue to be what it is at present, it will unavoidably be overwhelmed by that inundation of opposite and discordant opinions which would then rush into the offices of state, and terminate only in anarchy and confusion.

Let it be once more repeated, that the constitution, as it at present is framed from the blending together of the Hierarchical, Monarchical, Aristocratical, and Democratical forms of government, that with a con-

stitution thus framed none will agree who by the principle of their religion are attached only to one of the forms of which it is compounded, that therefore it is necessary even to the existence of the present constitution, that its offices should be administered only by those who from principle are friends to it, and whose religion depends upon the preservation of the constitution; and therefore he that wishes to preserve it cannot consistently vote for the repeal of the Test laws; because if he does he must necessarily vote for the destruction of that which at the same time he wishes should be preserved.

As it is not intended to detain your Lordship with a long letter, and much less with such a length of scribble as that of your friend the Layman, let us hasten to a conclusion, previously observing on that very nugatory pretence for repealing the Test, which is derived from the profanation of the sacrament by occasional conformity.

The occasional conformist it must be acknowledged certainly doth profane the sacrament; and therefore—what?—therefore the Test laws ought to be repealed, say the Dissenters and your Lordship's friend, and then there could be no occasional conformity.

True,

True, my Lord, there could not, but then by a parity of reasoning the Ten commandments ought to be repealed, and then there could be no transgression of them ; by a parity of reasoning oaths should be abolished, and then there would be no perjury. It is at the peril of the occasional conformist if he profanes the sacrament, but the law which requires evidence of the principles of persons employed in the state, is not the cause of the profanation any more than the law requiring an oath to be taken is the cause of the perjury which may follow. If your Lordship, or Lordship's friend for you, can prove that government hath no right to require evidence of the principles of those whom it employs you will do something, but till you have or can do this all arguments drawn from the profanation of the sacred rite by the occasional conformist are childish and nugatory in the extreme.

The conclusion from the foregoing observations is, that the pamphlet so strongly recommended by your Lordship is not what you have represented it to be. That the principle of it is faulty, as there can be no *right* to a toleration, and much less a right for persons to enjoy the privileges of a society of which they are not truly members.

That the Test laws do not respect the church in particular but the whole constitution ; that the test is not a test only of the religion a person may profess, its object is to discover the principle of the person, whether friendly or hostile to the constitution, the merit of his religion, as a religion is totally out of the question ; that the consequence of the test is not an exclusion from office, on account of creeds or modes of worship, and therefore that the Test laws are not persecuting, nor the Dissenters, as this writer represents, persecuted.

Every state hath indisputably within itself a right to require evidence of the principles of those whom it employs, and whether they are friendly or hostile. It hath also as certainly a right of determining what shall or shall not be deemed such evidence. Availing itself of such right the state hath required that all persons employed in offices under it, shall within a limited time receive the sacrament of the Lord's Supper, according to the usage of the Church of England, and they who refuse to comply with such requisition are adjudged to hold principles unfriendly to the constitution. Where now, in the exercise of this undoubted right, is the persecution of the Dis-

Dissenters? No where, my Lord, it is a right fully authorised by all the known laws of justice, equity, and right reason, with which the world hath at any time been made acquainted.

There is one most curious argument which your friend hath urged for the abolition of the Test, and hath been overlooked in the foregoing observations. It is this: "that the Test was originally framed against the Papists, at a time when there were no Dissenters, and that therefore it ought not to operate against the Dissenters." This redoubted argument shall be answered by the following short apologue: A farmer who had frequently been plundered in his poultry-yard by the foxes, whom he could by no art or stratagem circumvent, after some thought contrived a fence which would for ever keep them off from coming any where upon his premises. There were at this time no other beasts or vermin in the country that were at all troublesome to him. In process of time, however, the wolves came into his neighbourhood, and the fence proving a sufficient barrier against them also, an old wolf took an opportunity of accosting the farmer, and requesting him to admit him and his comrades to come upon his premises, for that

it was a great hardship upon them to be thus shut out. The fence, says he, you well know, was never originally intended against us, for we were not in the country when you raised it; and besides we are as great enemies to the foxes as you can be, and with our assistance, were the fence entirely thrown down, you would need be under no apprehension from them. What you say, Mr. Wolf, replies the farmer, is in a great measure true; the fence originally was certainly not intended against you, and I can well believe that you are as great an enemy to the foxes as I myself am; but as you are as great an enemy to me as you are to the foxes, with your good leave the fence shall continue just as it is, and I am happy to find that it answers the double purpose of keeping out the wolves as effectually as it does the foxes.

And now, my Lord, having done with the pamphlet, suffer a few words to be addressed to your Lordship and your friends in particular; and they are to request you to look, to reflect upon the English constitution, and then say where upon earth you can find greater or even equal excellence; regular in its formation, mild in its operations, friendly, benevolent to all, anxious

ious only for its own preservation, and this anxiety expressed not by any unjust, oppressive, or persecuting measures, but by those wise and prudent ones which every householder adopts for the preservation of himself and his family, who would be condemned as a miserable manager if he was to admit into his service persons who were known to be enemies to his domestic arrangements and œconomy. Such, and such only is the anxiety expressed by the constitution for its own preservation ; and therefore in such expression of it, in the eyes of all wise and experienced persons is it altogether irreprehensible ; and as it is irreprehensible in this, so likewise is it most truly admirable in the happiness of its temperament and the happiness which we all enjoy under it. Our kings shine with the splendour of Eastern monarchs, but without any of their terrific powers ; gently are they coerced without violence or disrespect, and their throne is established by the freedom of those over whom they reign. The subject likewise hath all the happiness that he is capable of in a state of society, and if he is restrained from licentiousness, still is he not abridged of his liberty, and knows no controul but the controul of the laws. Such then being the blessings

of our most excellent constitution, where is the heart that doth not vibrate in unison with the prayer?—O preserve it Heaven!—Let us lay aside then, my Lord, all those little party cabals, those factious doings, the marks of children rather than of men, of which we have heard so much of late. If we are men of ambition let us display that true nobleness of soul which faith, it is better that my ambition should be disappointed, than that the constitution should be overthrown. If we have been treated with indignity by any particular individuals let us not, for the sake of gratifying a poor despicable resentment, hazard the introduction of a general fire and confusion, but with a firm stedfastness, which will do us honour, let us repress our resentment within its proper limits; or if it must be gratified, let us gratify it without acting like madmen. In a word let no views of party ambition or resentment operate upon us; let no hopes of bettering our fortune, or of being relieved from our domestic necessities, induce us to risk, to hazard any thing which may even by a casual contingency endanger the constitution; but let it be our pride, as assuredly it is our interest, ever to preserve it inviolate.

And

And with regard to you, my Lord, it is recommended to you to persevere industriously in your studies, that you may again instruct the Bishops in religion; teach again law to the Lord Chancellor: carefully, moreover, endeavouring to improve yourself in the several manœuvres of the Cleft Stick, whereby so much strength, as by the various exertions of your arms and body, so much grace is added to the throws of your Lordship's oratory.

I have the honour to be, my Lord,

Your very humble Servant.









